

Benchmarking Best Practices In Accountability Systems



Executive Summary



Consortium Benchmarking Study

Study Personnel

Peggy Odem, Associate Director
Gretchen Gemeinhardt, Senior Consultant
American Productivity & Quality Center

Bob Carlson, Director of Management Services
Council of Great City Schools

Technical Advisers

Denise Borders, Ph.D., President and COO
The McKenzie Group

Peggy Siegel, Ph.D., Director, Business/Education
Leadership Initiatives
National Alliance of Business

Contributing Authors

Peggy Odem
Gretchen Gemeinhardt

Editor

Craig Henderson

Membership Information

For more information about how to become a member of the International Benchmarking Clearinghouse, a service of the American Productivity & Quality Center (APQC), and receive publications and other benefits, call 800-776-9676 or 713-681-4020 or visit our Web site at www.apqc.org.

Copyright

© 2000 American Productivity & Quality Center, 123 North Post Oak Lane, Third Floor, Houston, Texas, 77024-7797. This report cannot be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, faxing, recording, or information storage and retrieval. Additional copies of this report may be purchased from the APQC Order Department at 800-776-9676 (US) or 713-681-4020. Quantity discounts are available.

ISBN 1-928593-38-0

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of publishing this report is to provide a reference point for and insight into the process and practices associated with certain issues. It should be used as an educational learning tool and is not a "recipe" or step-by-step procedure to be copied or duplicated in any way. This report may not represent current organizational processes, policies, or practices because changes may have occurred since the completion of the study.

OVERVIEW AND STUDY BACKGROUND

Overview of Accountability Systems

“Improving student performance requires a clear picture of what you want to accomplish, a comprehensive measurement system to gauge progress, and a commitment to act on the results to make appropriate changes.”

Former Colorado Governor Roy Romer

As defined in the March 1998 Education Commission of the States publication *Designing and Implementing Standards-Based Accountability Systems*, accountability systems are the systematic collection of input, process, and outcome data, as well as the use of these data, to make decisions about the effectiveness of schools, districts, or states.

In October 1998 the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS), National Alliance for Business (NAB), and the American Productivity & Quality Center (APQC) along with 14 urban school districts and other organizations launched a benchmarking study to identify best practices in accountability systems. At the project launch the school district sponsors were asked to imagine that they were designing a world-class performance-based accountability system in an attempt to identify the components that would need to be part of that system.

The world-class accountability system designed by the sponsoring school districts had seven major component areas:

- ◆ Leadership
- ◆ Climate/context
- ◆ Operations
- ◆ Human Resources
- ◆ Data Measurement/Management
- ◆ Communications
- ◆ Standards for Teaching/Learning

The outcome for this benchmarking project was to identify and learn from best practices from each of the seven component areas. Within the context of a benchmarking project, the term “best practice” means successful practices or those systems, processes or activities that enable an organization to meet or surpass its goals and/or benchmarks—that which can be learned from successful models to improve performance in our own schools.

“Education in this nation can improve dramatically if educators will share

with one another their own best practices and go outside education to learn the practices and dynamics of America's most successful organizations and apply them to their own institutions," said Dr. Jack Grayson Jr., chairman of APQC. "Today there isn't a major business in the United States that is not benchmarking best practices to improve productivity and quality. The same should be true for education."

Study Background

In 1998 the American Productivity & Quality Center and the Council of Great City Schools formed a partnership to identify and document best practices in accountability systems through the use of benchmarking. This first-of-its-kind study, entitled "Best Practices in Accountability Systems," began in October 1998. Dr. Denise Borders from the McKenzie Group and Dr. Peggy Siegel from the National Alliance of Business provided content expertise throughout the course of the project.

The purpose of this multi-organization benchmarking study is to identify and examine innovations, best practices, and key trends in the area of accountability systems with the goal of district accountability systems. The areas of focus include leadership, climate and context, operations, human resources, data management, communications, and standards for teaching and learning. This study affords participants the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the issues and challenges involved in implementing and enhancing district accountability systems. Seventeen school districts and organizations participated in the study by attending a series of planning sessions, completing data-gathering surveys, and attending or hosting on-site interviews. Six of the organizations were identified as having exemplary accountability systems and were invited to participate in the study as benchmarking "best-practice partners."

About the American Productivity & Quality Center (APQC)

APQC is a nonprofit source for performance improvement and decision support—information and knowledge, networking, research, training, and advisory services.

Dr. C. Jackson Grayson Jr., APQC's chairman, began investigating in 1995 whether benchmarking was being done in education and whether benchmarking could help educators and policy-makers improve the quality of learning, decision making, and strategy building in this critical area. His research revealed that, with a few exceptions, no one in higher education was systematically exchanging best practices. This finding catalyzed APQC to begin helping education institutions and organizations transfer best practices through benchmarking—best practices not only from education but also from business, government, and healthcare.

In 1992 APQC and 86 leading companies designed APQC's International Benchmarking Clearinghouse to help managers and leaders find and adapt best practices. Organizations of all sizes and industries partner with APQC to discover global best practices and grow into learning organizations.

For more information, or to contact APQC, please see the organization's home page at www.apqc.org.

About the Council of Great City Schools

The Council for Great City Schools (CGCS) is an organization of the nation's largest urban public school systems, advocating K-12 education in inner-city schools, and governed by superintendents and board of education members from 50 cities across the country.

Founded in 1956 and incorporated in 1961, the Council is located in Washington, D.C., where it works to promote urban education through legislation, research, media relations, management, technology, and other special projects.

The Council serves as the national voice for urban educators, providing ways to share information about promising practices and addressing common concerns.

For more information, or to contact the Council of Great City Schools, please see the organization's home page at www.cgcs.org.

Technical Advisers

Dr. Michael Casserly

Dr. Michael Casserly is the executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools—a national membership organization that represents large urban public schools districts. The organization has a leadership composed of superintendents and school board members from 57 member districts.

For more than 20 years, Dr. Casserly has represented the interests of urban public schools on Capitol Hill, where he is recognized as a key player in the nation's capital to shape federal policy. [*The Washington Almanac*, a guide to federal policy, notes that “Casserly is considered by many to be one of Washington's most effective education lobbyists...and fully committed to his constituency.”]

In addition to major legislative initiatives and reforms, Dr. Casserly convened the first-ever Public Education Summit for Mayors and Superintendents of the nation's big cities, played an instrumental role in convening the National Urban Education Summit, and coordinated the collaborative development of the six National Urban Education Goals. In the area of research, he has produced what is considered the most comprehensive set of report cards on the quality of urban education in America.

Before joining the Council, Dr. Casserly was a research assistant with the American Institutes for Research. He received his Ph.D. in 1982 from the University of Maryland.

Dr. Denise Borders

Dr. Denise Borders is the president of The McKenzie Group Inc., a national comprehensive educational consulting firm offering a broad range of direct services to both public and private organizations. Her areas of specialization include effective approaches to instructional issues and providing leadership training, curriculum and standards development, assessment and evaluation, instructional technology integration, management analysis, and organizational development services.

Previously, Dr. Borders worked as the associate director of accountability, assessment, research & evaluation, education, and professional development for the Department of Defense Education Activity. She has worked for the Baltimore City Public Schools and the Ithaca (NY) School District. She has assisted numerous school districts with their accountability systems. Dr. Borders has been a teacher in both K-12 and higher education. She has published several books and articles, all focusing on education and learning.

Dr. Borders received her Ph.D. in education research from Columbia University Teachers College, as well as three master's degrees in curriculum and teaching, urban education, and elementary education.

Dr. Peggy Siegel

Dr. Peggy Siegel is the director of business/education leadership initiatives at the National Alliance of Business in Washington, D.C. Dr. Siegel has more than 25 years experience in working in, consulting for, and analyzing state and local education systems. Since joining NAB in 1990, Dr. Siegel has worked with numerous state and local business and education leaders to improve their education systems. She also heads up NAB's quality in education initiatives, which reinforce state and local use of business expertise in accelerating student performance.

In 1992 Dr. Siegel conducted more than 200 interviews at four Baldrige Award winning companies and seven innovative education sites. The results were published in *Using Quality to Redesign School Systems: The Cutting Edge of Common Sense* (1994) by Jossey-Bass and the American Society of Quality. In 1998 Dr. Siegel wrote a case study of North Carolina's efforts to align and improve the entire state education system, based on the Baldrige Criteria. She has been a Baldrige examiner for three years, and is actively involved in advocating extension of the Baldrige Award in Education.

Dr. Siegel received her Ph.D. with honors in education administration from Ohio State University, where she also earned her master's in political science.

STUDY SPONSORS

APQC consortium benchmarking studies bring together diverse organizations with common needs for improvement. For this study, teams from urban school districts were involved. The study's sponsors are:

- Atlanta Public Schools,
- Chicago Public Schools,
- Cleveland Municipal Schools,
- Department of Defense Education Activity,
- Dayton Public Schools,
- Houston Independent School District,
- Los Angeles Unified School District,
- Miami-Dade County Public Schools,
- Memphis City Schools,
- Minneapolis Public Schools,
- New York City Board of Education,
- Philadelphia Public Schools,
- Pittsburgh Public Schools, and
- Seattle Public Schools.

BEST-PRACTICE PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

The sponsors of this consortium benchmarking study selected the following organizations as best-practice partners in the study. The selection process involved evaluating the responses from all organizations that completed a study screening survey and comparing their accountability initiatives with the best-practice criteria. The best-practice partner organizations that participated in the study are:

- Brazosport Independent School District,
- Houston Independent School District,
- Memphis City Schools,
- Nortel Networks,
- Seattle Public Schools, and
- St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital.

STUDY SCOPE

The following areas of focus define the content and structure of the accountability benchmarking study. Sponsors spent a day-and-a-half collaborating with the project team from APQC and CGCS and the advisers to refine this scope.

Leadership/Alignment

- Has central mission that drives the development of and support of performance measures
- Maintains board and stakeholder buy-in and commitment to accountability system
- Ensures districtwide understanding, support and acceptance of measurement and accountability approach

Climate/Context

- Supports collaborative environment
- Promotes use of teams for problem solving and decision making

Operations

- Establishes a performance measurement system that incorporates quantitative and qualitative measurement organizationwide

Human Resources

- Integrates student achievement into other district activities such as performance evaluation and professional development

Data Management/Measurement

- Uses measurement system as hold schools and district accountable
- Identifies best measurement instruments and applies consistently throughout the district

Communications

- Communicates measurement results in order to facilitate continuous improvement
- Listens and incorporates feedback from internal and external stakeholders

Standards for Teaching and Learning

- Aligns systems for teaching and learning with state- and district-mandated student achievement requirements

BENCHMARKING METHODOLOGY**Benchmarking: The Systematic Transfer of Best Practices**

The past decade has seen wrenching change for many organizations. As firms and institutions have looked for ways to survive and remain profitable, a simple but powerful change strategy called “benchmarking” has evolved and become popular. Benchmarking can be described as the process by which organizations learn, modeled on the human learning process. A good working definition is “the process of identifying, learning, and adapting outstanding practices and processes from any organization, anywhere in the world, to help an organization improve its performance.” The underlying rationale for the benchmarking process is that learning by example, from best-practice cases, is the most effective means of understanding the principles and the specifics of effective practices.

The most important aspects of benchmarking are twofold. First, it is not a fixed technique imposed by “experts,” but rather a process driven by the participants who are trying to change their organizations. Second, it does not use prescribed solutions to a problem but is a process through which participants learn about successful practices in other organizations and then draw on those cases to develop solutions that are most suitable for their own organizations.

Benchmarking is not copying, networking, or passively reading abstracts, articles, or books. It is action learning, as demonstrated in the following description of APQC’s consortium methodology. Benchmarking is not simply a comparison of numbers or performance statistics. Numbers are helpful for identifying gaps in performance, but true process benchmarking identifies the “hows” and “whys” for performance gaps and helps organizations learn and understand how to perform at higher levels.

Summary of APQC Consortium Benchmarking Methodology

There are two main phases in APQC’s consortium benchmarking methodology:

- selecting best-practice partners, and
- learning from the best.

Phase I—Selecting Best-Practice Partner Organizations

A list of best-practice *candidate* organizations was developed through primary and secondary research conducted by APQC, CGCS, Dr. Borders, and Dr. Siegel. Suggestions were compiled from this research, as well as from periodicals, industry journals, and knowledge from sponsors. A screening survey was developed and sent to more than 91 candidate organizations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Forty-one of the surveys were completed. Responses from the surveys were analyzed and presented to the study sponsors in May 1999. Based on the screening survey data, sponsors went through a selection process that determined the six best-practice organizations, all of which accepted the invitation to join the study as best-practice partners.

Phase II—Learning from the Best

The sponsor group and the study team developed a Site Visit Discussion Guide for use as the Phase II data collection tool. The six best-practice partners hosted subsets of the sponsor group on facilitated site visits. During the site visits, key personnel were asked questions from the Site Visit Discussion Guide. Excerpts from the site visit summaries are included throughout this final report.

The following table summarizes Phases I and II of APQC's consortium benchmarking methodology:

	Approach	Purpose	Deliverable/Outcome
Phase I	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Conduct primary and secondary research◆ Administer screening survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ To identify best-practice partner candidates◆ To screen partner candidates	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ List of partner candidates◆ Identification of best-practice partners◆ Screening Report
Phase II	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Conduct site visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ To extract innovative practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Site Visit Summaries◆ Final Report

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

APQC, CGCS, Dr. Borders, and Dr. Siegel would like to thank the Accountability consortium study participants. Throughout the study, sponsor representatives have provided valuable input into the scope of the study, the screening survey, the site visit discussion guide, partner organization selection, and site visit participation. The enthusiasm and dedication of the sponsor group ensured a successful study.

Special thanks are extended to the partner organization representatives who have taken time out of their busy schedules to participate in the Accountability study. Each member of the partner group has gone out of his or her way to contribute to the success of this study.